DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 265 SO 026 808

AUTHOR	Fier, Harriet, Ed.; And Others
TITLE	A Pledge Is a Promise. User Guide for Grades K-6. My America: Building a Democracy Series.
PUB DATE	94
NOTE	9p.; "My America" is a 12-unit multimedia series with each unit consisting of a 15-20 minute videotape, resource directory diskette, and brief 8-page user guide. Only the printed user guides are included here; see SO 026 804-810 and SO 026 536-540.
AVAILABLE FROM	New Castle Communications, 229 King Street, Chappaqua, NY 10514; available in English and Spanish.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Active Learning; American Studies; *Citizenship; *Civics; *Community; Cooperation; Critical Thinking; *Democracy; Elementary Education; Law Related Education; *Social Studies; Voting
IDENTIFIERS	*Pledge of Allegiance

ABSTRACT

This user guide is part of a multimedia unit using an interdisciplinary approach with hands-on learning to motivate children to participate actively in their schools and local communities, and to experience the democratic process. This unit focuses on the meaning of the words in the Pledge of Allegiance. Unit parts include: (1) video preview; (2) suggestions for using the unit; (3) getting ready to view the video; (4) video modeling lesson; (5) follow-up activities for primary, intermediate, and upper grade children; and (6) a bibliography for children and teachers. (EH)

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For Grades K-6

Available in English and Spanish

ED 404 265

A Pledge Is a Promise

User Guide

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My America: Building a Democracy

GOALS

To help children:

- become familiar with the democratic process and active citizenship,
- recognize what it means to be a citizen in a multicultural society,
- build skills in communications and cooperation,
- recognize how laws are made and how a single vote and voice matter, and
- experience how caring and commitment build community.

FORMAT

MY AMERICA is a 12-unit series, consisting of:

- 15-20 minute videos
- User Guides
- Resource Directory Disks (MS-DOS & MAC)

Materials were designed by educators, for educators. An interdisciplinary approach to hands-on learning is used.

EDUCATIONAL CONTENT

The MY AMERICA kits motivate children to participate actively in their schools and local communities, and to experience the democratic process. The series attempts to demystify the government, explain how laws are made, and show how American democracy is always evolving. MY AMERICA combines elements of traditional civics and social studies curricula with techniques and activities that encourage children to participate and become involved. **Its underlying theme is: Democracy works best when everyone participates.**

MY AMERICA teaches in the voices of children in a way that respects their intelligence and natural curiosity.

THE VIDEOS

Each tape contains on-location documentaries, animation and historical illustration. A classroom modeling lesson encourages children to use their skills in reading, writing, listening, painting, singing and performing. The cooperative learning model is central to each video.

"Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world: indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

—Margaret Mead

Videos are developed within the following framework:

Kid View: Children give thought-provoking, lively opinions on each topic.

Documentary: Historical context and current concerns are blended with examples of children making a difference in their communities. This section is rich in historical information and opens up a wide range of discovery possibilities.

Modeling Lesson: Educators and students develop an interdisciplinary activity designed to bring alive the educational objective of the video.

Wrap Up: The key concept is recapped from the diverse perspectives of both children and adults.

PAUSE POINTS

The videotapes can be used in a variety of ways. Some educators use the tapes to teach three separate lessons on a concept. To facilitate this usage, a blackboard icon comes up between the Kid View, the Documentary and the Modeling Lesson, giving educators appropriate PAUSE POINTS during which to elaborate on concepts.

THE USER GUIDES

Guides provide multiple learning experiences, lesson plans and bibliographies built around social studies and citizenship themes. Suggested activities are interdisciplinary in approach and focus on skills in communication and cooperation.

RESOURCE DIRECTORY DISKS (MS-DOS & MAC)

MY AMERICA Resource Directory Disks include black-lined master activity sheets, samples of letters to parents and organizations, petitions, proclamations and press releases—all of which can be customized. Also included are a listing of additional resources, bibliographic references for students and teachers, historical documents, and curriculum correlations.

This icon 💾 indicates that additional material is available on the MY AMERICA Resource Directory Disk.

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A Pledge Is a Promise

My America
Building a Democracy

Educational objective:

To understand the meaning of the words in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Student concept:

I promise to take care of my country.

Video preview

People make pledges when they promise to take care of a person, a place, or a thing. Children learn the history of the Pledge of Allegiance and think about the meaning of the words in their lives. In 1892, when President Benjamin Harrison asked people to think of a way to mark the 400th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the Americas, a one-sentence pledge written by Francis Bellamy was published in the children's magazine *Youth's Companion*. The pledge caught on, and since October 1892, school children start every morning by pledging to take care of their country. To help children understand the meaning of the pledge, each word is defined in a lively way. After thinking about the people and things they love, a class of children writes its own pledges.

"No matter how you say the Pledge of Allegiance, you're always an American — whatever you believe in or whatever culture you are, it doesn't matter."

—Fifth grader
New York

Suggestions for using "A Pledge Is a Promise"

As an Opening and/or Culminating Experience to a Unit of Study: Supplement existing social studies curriculum with the *A Pledge is a Promise* video and suggested activities. These resources introduce and engage students in the concept of taking care of their country.

As an Individual Lesson: Use suggested activities to initiate class discussion about what they cherish in their lives. These activities help children learn to work together as a unit. Activities are divided into those appropriate for for primary, intermediate, and upper elementary school children.

As an Assembly Program: One class writes each word of the Pledge of Allegiance on a separate piece of oaktag. Each class member goes to the front of the auditorium carrying a piece of oaktag containing a word from the pledge. When the teacher signals, each child steps forward and says the word and what it means. For example, a "republic is a place where people vote." The teacher/facilitator then introduces the videotape "*A Pledge Is a Promise.*"

Pledge of Allegiance in Spanish

Juro lealtad a la bandera de los Estados Unidos de America y a la Republica que representa una Nacion individual bajo Dios con libertad y justicia para todos.

My America
Building a Democracy

A Pledge Is a Promise

"It's an exciting experience for the children because it puts them in touch with the government that is taking care of them."

—Linda Troani
Modeling Teacher
Mt. Kisco Elementary School
Mt. Kisco, NY

Getting ready to view the video

• Each day millions of school children recite the Pledge of Allegiance with little understanding of the meaning of the words. It is a thirty-one word sentence written as a salute to the flag and the ideals of American democracy. Preparing to view this video means helping the children define the concept of a "pledge" and each word in the Pledge of Allegiance in their own words.

• For primary grade children, start by reading one of the books in the MY AMERICA Bibliography that dramatizes a person making and keeping a promise. The reading can provide a springboard for defining a promise and for discussion on promises the children have made and kept in their lives.

• For intermediate grade children, print and distribute the promises and pledges made by Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and 4H-Club members. These can be found in the MY AMERICA 🖬. Ask children who belong to these organizations to explain what the words of these promises mean to them. What is similar among these pledges? Introduce the concept of the Pledge of Allegiance.

• For upper grade children, print and distribute the Dictionary Activity Sheets from the MY AMERICA. 🖬 Discuss how the Pledge of Allegiance was originally written, why it is recited daily in school, and how it has changed over the years.

Key vocabulary: pledge, allegiance, flag, united, republic, nation, indivisible, liberty, justice, oath, promise

Key phrases: "I give you my word," "I pledge...," I promise ...," "with liberty and justice for all," "one nation under God," "the United States of America," "to break a promise"

Video Modeling Lesson: Writing a Pledge

★Before children write their own pledge, place those words of the Pledge of Allegiance that are new to the class on a chart, in the form of a Word Splash. Ask the children to research each word in the dictionary and then write the definition in their own words. This process leads to the definition of a pledge as a promise and to discussion of how one keeps a promise.

★Ask the children "When have you ever made a promise?" After the children tell their stories, ask them to close their eyes and think about the following questions:

- What does it mean to make a promise?
- To whom do you make a promise?
- Why do you make a promise?

★Give the children time to ponder these questions. Ask them to think of a person, place, or thing that is important to them and write a pledge or a promise to take care of this special person, place, or thing. Using "telling" sentences or free verse, or in the form of a poem, ask them to write:

- My promise is...
- This promise is important to me because...
- I am going to keep this promise by...

★Each child reads his or her pledge to the class.

Modeling Lesson Materials: chart paper, magic marker, dictionaries, paper and pencils

Modeling Lesson Facts: The Pledge of Allegiance was:

- Officially adopted by the U.S. Congress in 1942 — 50 years after it was written.
- Written by Francis Bellamy in two hours.

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Follow-up activities for primary grade children

★Form a circle, with the children seated around a chart. Ask them "When you take care of a person, what are the special things you do?" List responses on the chart. Ask, "When you take care of a place, what are the special things you do?" List responses on the chart. Then ask, "When you take care of a thing, what are the special things you do? List responses and tape the list sheets on the board.

★Explain what it means to "break a promise." Did anyone ever break a promise to them? How did they feel? How did they respond? Did they ever break a promise to someone? Why? Is there ever a good reason to break a promise? The children illustrate situations and their feelings after they think about and share experiences related to breaking a promise.

★When someone is elected Mayor of a city or town, he or she promises to take care of the town and everyone who lives in it. The promise is made at a special "inauguration" ceremony. It is called an oath. Have the children write to the Mayor and request a copy of the oath. See the MY AMERICA for a sample Mayor's Oath and a sample letter requesting a copy of your town's or city's mayoral oath.

Follow-up activities for intermediate grade children

★We celebrate Earth Day every April. It is a day of cooperative caring for everything alive on the planet. People come together to clean littered areas, plant seeds and trees, and care for their neighborhoods. Print the Earth Day Pledge from the MY AMERICA (located in the "A Pledge Is a Promise" file). Distribute it to the children. Discuss what the words mean.

★Using the Earth Day Pledge Activity sheet in the MY AMERICA, ask the children to write their own promise to the Earth for the coming year. After writing their pledge, the children create an Earth Day vest using a large paper bag or shopping bag. They cut slits up the middle of the front of the bag, a circle in the bottom of the bag for a neck hole, and two arm holes in the sides of the bag. They write their Earth Day Pledge on the back of the vest and illustrate and decorate the vest front with symbols of the Earth they hold close to their hearts.

★The governor of each state takes an oath of office when inaugurated. In this special promise, governors pledge to do their best to take care of their state and the people in it. For a sample Governor's Oath and a sample letter requesting a copy of the oath the governor of your state takes, see the MY AMERICA.

"It is a very great thing to be able to think as you like."

—Matthew Arnold

Find It In The MY AMERICA

- **Seven states have pledges to their flags. See the for exact wording. Locate these states on a map of the U.S.**
- **See the for the entire presidential oath, as well as those taken by governors, mayors, police officers, and firefighters.**

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A Pledge Is a Promise

"If I had to make a pledge, I'd say it doesn't matter if you are black or white."

—Fifth Grader
New Mexico

Follow-up activities for upper grade children

★In the video, a child says she does not stand up for the Pledge of Allegiance because she is "Six Nations." This means she is from a group of Native American Nations known as the Iroquois Confederacy or Six Nations, which includes the Mohawk, the Onondagas, the Oneidas, the Cayugas, the Senecas, and the Tuscaroras.

Each nation has its own language, land, and law. Children born into one of these nations pledge to honor the culture and tradition of their nation and all life on Earth. One Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy is like a pledge:

"In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."

Why is it a good idea to think about decisions that have an impact on lives of people yet to be born?

★If the children think the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy is a good idea, ask them to read the newspaper and focus on a recent decision of a local, elected official. Ask them to debate the impact of the decision on the next seven generations in their city or town. The children write letters to the official and express their opinion on his or her decision. They indicate whether the decision should stand, be modified, or be eliminated, using the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy as the criterion and the decision's affect on their grandchildren and great, great-grandchildren.

★The Pledge of Allegiance written by Francis Bellamy was 23 words long. It was a way to help immigrant children learn to honor their new country. Over the years, the wording has changed. See the MY AMERICA 💾 for words that were added in 1923 and in 1954. Do the children agree with the changes? Ask them to research what was happening politically at the time of these changes. Brainstorm the process that might be used to modify the pledge in this decade. How would they change the pledge? Are there other groups of people who do not say the Pledge? Why? See the MY AMERICA 💾 for an Activity Sheet to get started.

The MY AMERICA Newsletter publishes active citizenship projects and activities. Send your photos, stories, and videotapes to:

MY AMERICA Newsletter
c/o New Castle Communications
229 King Street
Chappaqua, NY 10514

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FOR TEACHERS

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Check the MY AMERICA for additional books, resources, and activity sheets that extend the concepts of A Pledge Is a Promise.

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MY AMERICA:
LEARNING ABOUT
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Production
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MY AMERICA consists of the following program titles:

What Is a Flag?
A Pledge Is a Promise
Neighborhood and Community
Liberty and Justice
What Is an American?
The Story of the National Anthem
What Is a Democracy??
How Our Laws Are Made
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Resources available, AT NO CHARGE, when you purchase the entire multimedia series:
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"In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."

—The Great Law of the Six Nations
Iroquois Confederacy

About New Castle Communications, Inc.
MY AMERICA is published by New Castle Communications, Inc. The company is creating educational materials in video, print and computer software formats. New Castle Communications is committed to designing, producing and distributing multimedia materials that engage children and inspire them to get involved in their classrooms, schools and communities.

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